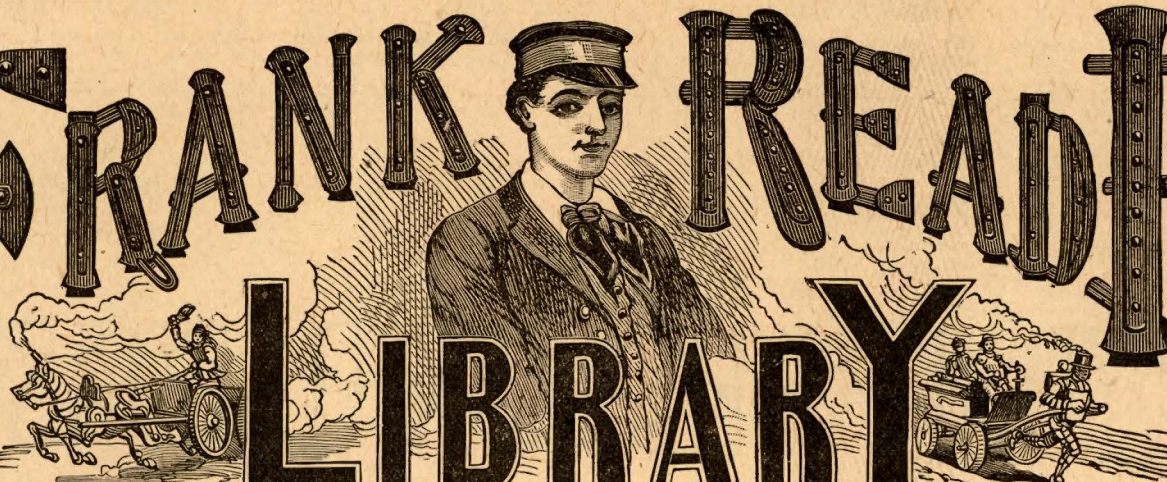


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## BEYOND THE GOLD COAST: or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Overland Trip With His Electric Phaeton.

By "NONAME."



There was a sudden shock and stifled yells. Dark forms went bounding into the air and rolled over upon the ground. A literal heap of them were struggling and squirming over the tingling wires.

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# BEYOND THE GOLD COAST;

OR,

## FRANK READE, JR.'S OVERLAND TRIP WITH HIS ELECTRIC PHAETON.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Six Sunken Pirates," "Lost in a Comet's Tail," "Astray in the Selvas; or, The Wild Experiences of Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp, in South America With the Electric Cab," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER I.

#### A SAD STORY.

THERE was a great press of teams on Broadway, near the corner of Canal street, in the City of New York one spring day.

Now this was no unusual thing, in fact quite a common occurrence for that crowded thoroughfare. But out of this particular blockade sprang an incident upon which all the material of our story must hinge.

A young man of striking appearance was walking rapidly along in the crowd. For some while his gaze had been fixed with curious interest upon the figure of a woman who was some yards in front of him.

The woman was past the middle age of life, and her once beautiful dark hair was plentifully streaked with gray. Her face was half veiled, but in spite of this one could, by sharp observation, see that it was one of great refinement and, despite her advanced age, of beauty.

"On my word," the young man muttered, "she reminds me strongly of my mother, who is dead long ago. And she is certainly in trouble."

The woman's clothes were neat but shabby. She was certainly an object much out of place in that hurrying, bustling, business crowd. She excited hardly a passing glance from anybody, and then her tottering, uncertain footsteps and moist eyes, caused them to accept the common conclusion that she was in a state of intoxication.

But the young man, whose heart was in the right place, knew better. He had watched her intently, and his sympathy was deeply aroused.

For she was in trouble.

"What can it be," he mused, "has she lost a dear friend, or is it financial trouble? I have a mind to ask her."

But if he had really intended doing this he was prevented at the moment by an incident. The woman suddenly turned and darted among the heavy mass of teams to cross this street.

A policeman shouted to her; several people paused with morbid interest to see if she would be crushed under heavy wheels.

And she certainly would have been but for the young man who had so strangely interested himself in her.

With a leap he sprang in front of a pair of plunging horses. He grasped their bits and reined them back. The woman had fallen almost under their hoofs.

She was saved, for the policeman was already there and carried her to the sidewalk. A crowd gathered.

It was but a step to the nearest police alarm box and the officer had rung for a relief. It came a moment later.

Meanwhile the woman was in a dazed condition and the young man was indignantly expostulating with the officer.

"Can't you see that she is a refined lady and should not be taken to headquarters?" he cried angrily.

"Be careful, young feller, or I'll rope you in too," growled the officer. "She's a vagrant I tell you. She'll have a chance to tell her story at headquarters."

The youth's anger was of no avail. But determined to see the thing out he went along to headquarters too.

At the clerk's desk the woman for the first time recovered herself. Her eyes flashed fire as she said with dignity:

"How dare you arrest me who am guilty of no wrong deed?"

"A vagrant, sir," said the officer. "Not all here," tapping his forehead.

"I beg your pardon," said the young man hotly. "I believe that is an unjust charge!"

"Oh! what brought you here," growled the officer. "You're mighty interested."

"Yes, I am," said the young man, firmly, "and be more respectful to me, sir, or I will prove to you that I have sufficient influence to have you punished."

The officer shrunk back a little while the clerk said:

"Do you know this woman?"

"No."

"How can you dispute the officer then?"

"By my own discernment and observation. Any one can see that she is a lady of refinement, and not a vagrant. I am sure that she is in great trouble, and did not realize her peril in rushing into the street. She needs help, I am confident, and I stand ready to help her."

At this brave speech even the stolid policeman was a bit inclined to yield. But the lady turned her sweet face up to her champion with streaming eyes and said:

"Yes, kind, sir, I am in sore trouble, and you are the first to speak kind words to me in many days. God will repay you for that."

"Well," said the young man, eagerly, "I am sure the sergeant here is a good man. Will you not tell us your story, and perhaps we can right your wrongs?"

The sergeant bowed pleasantly, and opened a gate in the railing.

"Come into this private room," he said. "You may go, McDonough," to the officer.

Seated in the private room the woman removed her veil and said:  
 "Perhaps my name may be familiar to you when you hear it. It has been so coupled with disgrace, that I almost hesitate to speak it. Yet there is no stain upon it in truth. I am Mrs. James Morden.

The sergeant gave a start.

"Are you the mother of Alfred Morden, the bank robber?" he asked.

"I am the mother of Alfred Morden, but my boy is not a bank robber. It is true that he is sentenced to Sing Sing for twenty years, but he is as innocent of the crime as when he was a babe at my breast."

She spoke so strongly and so earnestly that her words seemed to carry the very conviction of truth with them.

"Have you any new evidence to prove your son's innocence?" asked the sergeant. "You know the court was obliged to find him guilty."

The young man had been intently watching the woman's face. He saw that undying light of mother's loyalty in her fine old eyes.

"No," she said, brokenly. "I have no new evidence."

"What was the evidence?" asked her young friend.

The sergeant replied:

"It was very conclusive. The Merchants' Bank was skillfully burglarized. One safe was opened and ten thousand dollars abstracted. Also some gold eagles. An anonymous letter put the officers on the track, and in Morden's room, in his own trunk, the gold was found. He has never surrendered the banknotes. It was quite a pathetic case."

The sergeant's manner implied that all had been done that was possible for the afflicted woman. He arose politely to bow his visitors out.

"We will not hold you, Mrs. Morden," he said; "it was all a mistake. MacDonough did not know you."

But Mrs. Morden gave a little anguished cry.

"Oh, I beg you, do yield me a trifle of faith," she cried, "at least listen to a true story I have to tell you, for as true as Heaven I think I can give you the name of the villain who threw the meshes of the awful net about my boy. I believe that he was the guilty man."

The sergeant looked a trifle reluctant, but, exchanging glances with the young man, he again sat down.

"Well, Mrs. Morden," he said, "I will be pleased to hear you."

"I will not dwell upon the awful heart anguish caused me by the polite but cold indifference to my story," she said tensely. "I have just been to my lawyers, House & Humston. I was sure they would find something encouraging in my new revelation—my new discovery—but alas! they said that there was not sufficient evidence, and bowed me politely out of their office. That was why I wandered down the street in so dazed a condition. Indeed, had those teams crushed me I would not have cared. Unable to help my boy out of prison, death will be a relief."

"But let me tell my story. You will remember that Alfred had a friend who stuck by him through the trial. His name is Tony Biglin. I am convinced that he was my son's worst enemy."

"Ten years ago my husband, James Morden, who was a sea captain, took a voyage to the coast of Africa. For two years I heard nothing from him. Then I got a travel stained letter telling me that he was on his deathbed."

"His ship had been wrecked upon the Gold Coast of Africa. Losing all that he had in the world, he was unable to get home and joined a company of gold seekers, who were bound into the interior, to mend his fortunes."

"He was successful in finding a very rich mine in the Ashantee country, but just as he was about to reap a fortune from it he was stricken down with a fatal fever."

"In his letter he enclosed a description of the location of the mine, and advised me to send Alfred to the Gold Coast to develop it. For years Alfred and I have worked for money enough to pay his way thither with the surety of his returning with a fortune."

"We never told anybody with the exception of Biglin of this. Now, all in a few months my son is sentenced to prison for twenty years. I am left to die with a broken heart, the description of the African mine and the papers have been stolen from my chamber in some mysterious way, and I have learned that Tony Biglin has sailed from New York upon a vessel bound for Gibraltar."

Mrs. Morden's listeners had heard, with the most intense of interest, this exciting narrative. The sergeant said:

"You did not tell all this at the trial?"

"The papers locating the mine had not been stolen then," said Mrs. Morden. "My attorneys did not deem the story of any value."

"And they have told you that nothing can be done in the matter?"

"That is what has discouraged me," she replied.

"Then you believe that Tony Biglin is the thief who stole the papers locating the mine?"

"I do!"

"But I cannot see that that is any way a proof of your son's innocence."

"Ah, but it is to me!" cried the fond mother. "Of course, Biglin wanted Alfred disposed of safely, before he should venture to steal the papers and start for Africa."

"Madam," said the sergeant, kindly, "if you desire I will put detectives upon this case, and do all in my power to help you. While your lawyers may be right, I earnestly believe that you and your son have been foully wronged. But law is law and your son must stay in Sing Sing until this villain's guilt is actually proved."

The expression upon the suffering mother's face was radiant.

"Oh, then you will help me?" she cried.

"As far as the law will allow me."

"Wait!"

It was a strong, resolute voice and the young man who had championed the misjudged woman arose. Both she and the sergeant saw that his face was drawn in resolute lines.

"Madam, your wrongs shall be righted, and I pledge you my word to do it. Sergeant, I give you my card. In return I will ask you to detail me one of your best detectives. We will start for Africa this week to see who shall open that mine. I am rich and can and will bear all the expense until the mine shall have yielded enough to repay me."

"Oh, Heaven bless you, sir!" cried the overjoyed mother.

The sergeant glanced at the card and gave a mighty start.

"FRANK READE, JR.,

"Readestown, U. S. A."

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "Is this Mr. Reade? I have to congratulate you, madam. You could not have a better nor stronger friend and champion."

## CHAPTER II.

### AT READESTOWN.

THE police sergeant was well warranted in his latter observation.

He knew that the handsome young man before him was one of the most famous characters on earth, and the chief of all inventors.

Frank Reade, Jr., the inventor of the air-ship, the submarine boat, the electric horses, and other wonderful triumphs of genius, was famed and known everywhere.

The sergeant's politeness became obsequious. In that moment the forlorn Mrs. Morden's case took a mighty turn for the better.

Frank Reade, Jr. was in earnest in what he said.

He was the true champion of the oppressed and here was a case which appealed to the very depth of his sympathetic soul.

He saw at once that Biglin was the rascal in the case.

He did not doubt Mrs. Morden's story in the slightest detail.

"I am very sorry," said the sergeant after some conversation, "but I am not allowed to detail a man to go so far as Africa. But I can give you the address of the best private detective in America."

"Let me have it then," said Frank. "I will go and see him at once!"

The Sergeant wrote on a card:

"SEELAH SHARPE."

No. 142 Nassau St., Room —.

This he gave to Frank and then the young inventor and Mrs. Morden left the police station.

On the street Frank called a carriage.

He insisted upon Mrs. Morden's taking rooms at a first-class hotel, for her shabby lodgings and fare were not what she had been accustomed to. She remonstrated when he placed a handsome check in her hands, but he said:

"I am pleased to favor you. It may remain a loan until the African mine yields a return."

Then leaving the woman overwhelmed with her sudden good fortune to be driven home, Frank proceeded to Nassau street.

Seelah Sharpe, the detective, was not in his office, but Frank left a note, asking him to come to Readestown at once.

Then Frank went to the Grand Central Depot and took a train home.

Readestown was a beautiful little city in a deep valley, with a river navigable to the sea.

It had been founded by ancestors of Frank's. Its principal buildings were the machine works of the young inventor.

Frank was met at the depot by his own carriage, and driven at once to the machine shops.

As he alighted at the big gate a comical little ducky with a sturdy frame and dancing, mischievous eyes met him.

"Mornin', Marse Frank. Glad fo' to see yo' home from New York, sah."

"Pomp!" cried the young inventor. "Where is Barney?"

"Dat 'fishman, sah? He am jes' inside in de yard, sah!"

"Be jabers, that's not thrue, sar. Here I am indade."

Out from the yard bounded a genuine specimen of the Celt with a shock of red hair and a mug as broad as the rest of his face.

Barney O'Shea was his name, and he and the ducky Pomp were Frank's faithful adherents. Indeed the young inventor depended much upon them, for they accompanied him upon all his trips.

Frank made a gesture of pleasure and said:

"I am glad you are so prompt, Barney. But come! I want to see you both upon very important business."

"All right, sah!"

"I'm wid yez!"

Barney turned a cartwheel and Pomp made a flipflap. Then they made goggle eyes at each other, for they were as full of fun as a nut is of meat.

While they were the best of friends it was natural for each to be nagging the other or playing practical jokes in which it was an even thing which had the best of it.

Frank led the way across the yard to a small brick building, which contained his private office.

In this he did the most of his planning and draughting for his inventions. Here he seated himself at a table, and said:

"Barney, how long would it take you to get the electrical engines of the Phaeton in working order?"

"Shure, sor, it only wants the placing av another dynamo, sor," replied the Celt, readily. "About two days, I think."

"Pomp, how long will it take you to place stores for two months aboard the Phaeton?"

"Golly, Marse Frank, it wouldn't take dis chile mo' dan a day fo' to do dat, sah!"

Frank was thoughtful for some moments. In fact, so extended was his reverie, that Barney ventured to ask:

"Begorra, sor, are yez thinkin' av another thrip, sor?"

"That is just it," replied the young inventor. "Barney and Pomp, I want the Phaeton in readiness to leave here inside of three days."

"All roight, sor!"

"It will be ready, sah!"

"But will yez shart roight out from Readstown over the road, sor, or will yez be afther packin' the machine in sections fer some foreign country, sor?"

"It must be packed in sections," declared Frank, "have the railroad company run four cars into the yard to-day. We must begin packing at once."

"Shure, sor, then it's to some foreign country we're goin'?"

"Yes, to Africa!"

"To Afriky? Well, now, there's a chance fer yez to look up some av your ancistors, naygar."

"Don' yo' be sassay wif me; yo' no count I'ish," sniffed Pomp.

"Yes," said Frank; "we are going beyond the gold coast and even into the Ashantee country to search for a famous gold mine. I want all in readiness for the start in three days. I shall charter a steamer in New York for Cape Three Points direct. Now you will not fail me?"

"Shure yez niver need fear that, sor!" cried Barney.

"Well, be off, both of you, now, and report when all is ready. Wait!"

"Well, sor?"

"You must remember that we are going into a perilous country. The Ashantee natives are none too friendly, and there are many rascally whites in that country. We must have plenty of arms and ammunition."

"We're bound to look out fo' dat, sah!" cried Pomp, "don' yo' fear one illy bit, sah!"

And away the two jokers went intent upon their duties.

Left alone, Frank proceeded to pack away all his valuable papers into a safe and make other preparations for leaving home.

While he was thus busying himself a messenger boy came in with a telegram.

Thus it read:

"TO FRANK READE, JR.,

Readstown,

"Am sorry that I was out when you called. I will comply with your request, and look for me in Readstown on the morning train.

"Yours for business,

"SEELAH SHARPE, Detective."

Frank filed the telegram away and then wrote a reassuring letter to Mrs. Morden. Then he went out and across the yard to a long, high roofed building.

He opened the door. A number of workmen were busying themselves about the place.

But upon a small platform was a most extraordinary vehicle. It was unlike any which we see every day upon the streets.

It was neat, graceful and elegant as the finest coach, but of course very much larger. This was the latest triumph of Frank Reade, Jr.'s inventorial ability.

The Electric Phaeton was truly a most wonderful vehicle. In shape it was about forty feet in length, with a body of polished steel. Above the main floor of the vehicle there arose the top and frame, also of steel.

Let us first mention the running work. This was of light but strong steel, the wheels having rubber tires like those of a bicycle. The forward wheels were governed by a traverse frame so that the Phaeton could be easily steered in any direction. The rear wheels were connected with driving bars with the machinery in the lower part of the vehicle, and this furnished the propelling power.

In the lower body of the Phaeton there were double doors made to slide upon a rail. Also there were a number of dead-eye windows or portholes, which furnished not only light for the interior, but were useful to fire out of in case the vehicle was attacked by a foe.

Above this lower floor was the main floor of the Phaeton. Forward there was a section of the framework covered with solid plates of steel. In this was a large observation window, and also the steering gear and electric keyboard. This made the pilot-house. Over it was a powerful search-light.

In the rear of the wagon was another solid section of framework with a sort of conning tower, built out of from it. Over all this was the roof or deck of the vehicle, which was itself protected with a guard rail.

This left the interval between the forward and rear sections open, or at least at the option of the voyagers, for there were sliding curtains of steel plates which could close together from right and left, and thus completely shut in the main part of the vehicle. These curtains operated upon a roller very much the same as fire-proof curtains used in large warehouses.

There were small windows in these curtains, and also in the rear. Above the top of the Phaeton were three small masts, upon which floated flags, giving it a gay appearance.

Last, but not least, was the dasher forward, where was the wonderful dynamite-electric gun, the invention of Frank Reade, Jr., and probably the most deadly weapon in the world.

This gun was very light, the barrel being of thin metal, and it worked by a system of electrically compressed air; but it could throw a deadly projectile of dynamite a long ways with frightful effect.

The interior of the Phaeton was equipped and furnished in the most luxurious and comfortable manner.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE START IS MADE.

AND this is a meager and incomplete description of the Electric Phaeton, Frank Reade, Jr.'s latest invention.

With the reader's kind permission we will now pass on to the exciting incidents of our story.

The next morning Seelah Sharpe was promptly on hand.

He was a shrewd and wiry little man, with dark eyes and a foxy cast of features. Probably there was not a more able detective in the whole of America.

He met Frank in his private office at the machine works.

He listened to Frank's narrative, and promptly accepted the undertaking.

"The villain shall be run down," he declared. "We will go prepared, and I will have the New York police procure extradition papers from the British government, and forwarded to me at Accra. We will turn the tables on Mr. Tony Biglin."

Then he gave a violent start.

"On my word," he cried, "I just happened to think. Can it be a coincidence? There has been an escape from Sing Sing, and the prisoner's name—by Jupiter! I think it was Morden."

"What!" exclaimed Frank in amazement, "is that so? Can it be that Alfred Morden has committed such a desperate deed?"

"And why not?" said Sharpe as he drew a New York paper from his pocket, "the man is innocent. It probably nerved him to terrible desperation to learn of the perfidy of Biglin and to reflect upon the terrible wrongs of himself and his suffering and aged mother."

"True!" cried Frank excitedly pacing the floor; "but this puts a new face upon matters. It may delay us in our undertaking, and

"Not a bit of it!" cried Sharpe. "Can't you see what Morden's first move will be? He will follow Biglin to the gold coast and there run him down. Ah, here is the paper."

He threw it upon the table and Frank read the startling headline.

"An Escape from Sing Sing!"

The escaping prisoner is the notorious bank robber Alfred Morden. He loosens the bars in his cell door, eludes the guard, risks a fusillade of bullets and swims the Hudson. Detectives and officers in hot pursuit. A pathetic letter found in his cell, which recounts a story of double dealing, perfidy and wrong, which if true proves him an innocent man and entitled to the sympathy of the world. It is remembered that Morden was convicted largely upon circumstantial evidence."

Frank read all this with a quivering sensation in his breast.

"God speed him!" he muttered. "I hope he will succeed in keeping out of the clutches of the law."

"Well, in one sense it prejudices his case," said Sharpe.

"If we secure indisputable evidence of his innocence it cannot do so."

"That is true."

"And that is what we must do. I think the sooner we get under way to the Gold Coast the better."

"So do I."

"If I could do anything to help young Morden to get there I would do it."

"So would I."

"Then you are ready to start at short notice, Sharpe?"

"A detective is always ready," was the reply; "this moment if you say so."

"To-morrow," declared Frank. "I will meet you in New York. I have already chartered the tramp steamer, Golden City, and she is ready to leave the moment we get my Electric Phaeton packed aboard."

"Good! I have not seen this wonderful invention."

"You have not? Come with me and you shall see it."

And Frank showed Sharpe the Phaeton, just as the workmen were about to take it apart and pack it in sections aboard the cars.

The detective was wonder struck and delighted with the vehicle.

"That will be just the thing to invade that perilous country with," he said. "We need fear no bullets with such splendid protection."

A short while later Sharpe left for New York.

Preparations went on rapidly for the great journey. It leaked out Frank was going to take a trip to Africa, but nothing further was known of his intentions. Great interest was manifested in the undertaking but the real object of the trip was kept secret.

In due time the tramp steamer Golden City steamed out of New York harbor with Frank Reade, Jr., Seelah Sharpe, the detective,

Barney and Pomp, and the Electric Phaeton on board, bound for Cape Three Points, on the Gold Coast.

There, in an out of the way place, the party were to be landed.

To dwell upon the incidents of the voyage would be tedious and of little interest to the reader, so let us pass over it and hurry on to the African coast.

One sultry day a number of men stood upon a high bluff which formed a part of the coast line of the Dark Continent.

Some of these men were engaged in hammering and working upon a heap of steel and other material, which, however, was not long in shaping itself into a wonderful object.

This was the Electric Phaeton.

The Golden City was at anchor in a little bay below. At last the party of gold hunters, for such they were, had set foot upon the Gold Coast.

There was no settlement or town near, and rolling plains extended back to a distant range of high mountains.

It had been a good place to make a landing.

The voyagers were not a little interested in the tropical region spread before them.

It was the first time that the detective, Sharpe, had seen the African country, and he was much interested.

The broad reaches of bright green grass, which extended over the plains, betokened a rich soil. The curious banyans and waving palms of cocoanut and date, were an odd sight.

"Our course lies far beyond those mountains," declared Frank; "indeed, well into the Ashantee country."

"Then we go beyond the Gold Coast region?" asked Sharpe.

"Yes, beyond the Gold Coast. Not far from here and contiguous to the sea, we will find plenty of civilization and people of our kind. But beyond those mountains, the region is wild, indeed, more like Central Africa. The natives are apt to be aggressive, and the white men are cut-throats and slave hunters. Oh, I daresay we shall have plenty of experience before we get home."

Progress on the Phaeton went rapidly forward.

As soon as it was well put together, the provisions and equipments were brought from the steamer.

Finally all was in readiness.

The Phaeton was in apple pie order and ready to start in a moment upon her great journey.

Frank gave his instructions to his workmen and to the captain of the Golden City, who was to visit the cape in two weeks, again in four weeks, and again in six weeks.

"If we have not returned by that time," said Frank, metaphorically, "you may be sure we will not return alive."

"But if you come here, and we are not here—" asked the captain.

"Then we will wait for your next coming," said Frank; "this is the best plan we can make."

"Very well, sir."

Barney and Pomp and Sharpe were already aboard the Phaeton. Frank now followed them.

The Golden City fired a yacht salute from her small brass deck cannon. Then Frank answered it in a more majestic way.

He turned the bow of the Phaeton to the edge of the bluff.

Then he placed a projectile in the breech of the electric gun. He sighted it carefully for the center of the bay, half a mile distant.

Then he pressed the electric button.

There was a slight recoil as the pneumatic tube flew back and a sharp ping, then far out in the water something struck the white caps.

There was an instant splash, then a roar, and a column of water full fifty feet high arose in the air.

It was a majestic spectacle, and brought a cheer from the sailors on board the Golden City.

"Jemima!" exclaimed Sharpe, the detective. "We needn't fear an army of foes with such a gun as that. Why, you could sink any ship with that."

"Well, the pneumatic gun is a formidable weapon," said Frank modestly.

He did not add that some of the foremost governments of the earth had offered him a fabulous price for the secret of the gun.

"I will not sell it," he declared; "if the time ever comes when my native country will need defense I will consecrate it to her. But not before!"

And he kept his word.

If the United States shall ever become involved in war and stand in dire need, then Frank Reade, Jr., with his wonderful inventions will certainly be sure to come to the rescue.

Without further preamble the start was now made.

Across the long plains the machine ran, as level and swift as an arrow.

She was in every sense a mechanical triumph. Her springs were so adjusted that even over the roughest ground the voyagers experienced no discomfort.

She was also so arranged that she could float in a river current, and there were adjustable paddles for the wheels so that she could ford or cross any stream.

In fact there was nothing unprovided for. Frank Reade, Jr., had looked out for this.

And the voyagers as the machine started so propitiously upon her journey were in the highest of spirits.

## CHAPTER IV.

### BEYOND THE GOLD COAST.

"Now," said Seelah Sharpe, the detective, "we must devote all our efforts to hunting down that rascally Biglin, and locating the Morden mice."

"You are right," agreed Frank. "And that reminds me of a plan I have conceived."

"Ah! what is it?"

"We must travel incog. That is, we must not reveal our identity in all towns we come to."

"Will that be possible for you with your world wide fame?" asked Sharpe, with a smile.

"Oh, they may have heard of me," said Frank, "but they have never seen me it is safe to assume."

"But the machine will be sure to put them on the track."

"I have thought not. However, we will not proclaim ourselves and go incog. as far as we can."

"Very good!"

"It is my opinion that we shall get no trace of Biglin until we get far beyond the mountains and the coast line."

"Well, so I think. Yet he may have left footprints on the coast which may guide us."

"Very true. We will be on the lookout for them."

The Phaeton had great speed, and upon the close-cropped level plain ran like a locomotive.

The sea quickly vanished from view, and the mountains loomed up very near at hand. Then the country became more broken and progress was slower.

But before darkness came on, Frank estimated that in the four hours' trip they had run a distance of ninety miles.

This brought them almost to the base of the mountains, and also to a region which was settled.

The slopes were seen to be fenced, and there were herds of cattle and sheep grazing upon the rich grasses.

Also the roofs of a small town were seen in a little cleft in the mountain wall. Toward this Frank turned the course of the machine.

"What?" exclaimed Sharpe in surprise. "Are you going to visit a settlement? Is it best?"

"I can see no harm in it," said the young inventor. "At least we may learn something of importance to us by so doing. We may get a clew."

Sharpe did not disagree with him so they approached the settlement.

It was in keeping with all of its kind in that new country, the buildings being of rough planks and the roofs thatched with swamp or jungle grass.

"What is it?" asked Sharpe. "A mining or a farming town?"

"A little of both," replied Frank; "it is commonly the case that every community in this country does more or less mining. Of course we are not in the big gold fields yet."

As they drew nearer the settlement now, men on horseback were seen driving cattle. They reined up in amazement at sight of the Phaeton.

To them it was the queerest vehicle they had ever seen, and they were wholly at a loss to understand its motive power.

They simply stared at it and might have done no more had not Frank stopped within hailing distance, and stepping out on the forward platform, shouted:

"Hello, strangers! What town is that over there?"

He saw that three of the men were Yorkshire Englishmen, and the other was a Hollander.

"Well, sur, 'e have the right to know, sur, an' I'll tell 'ee," replied one of the Yrkschiremen, touching his woolen cap, "it be the village of Avon, sur, an' ye be welcome there if 'e care to go there, an' 'e be a good English heart."

"Well," replied Frank, "I am an American. How will that do?"

The Yrkschireman bowed again.

"Jest the same, good squire. May luck be with 'ee."

With which the sheep and cattle herders again doffed their caps and then galloped away as if glad to get away from so uncanny an article as the Electric Phaeton.

Sharpe laughed at this.

"They evidently don't care much for our acquaintance," he said; "they gladly leave us."

"Well, I am willing," said Frank, "let us go on to Avon. That must be named after the home of the immortal Shakespeare. Well, those fellows were of an ignorant class. I shall look to find better informed people in the village."

"It may be so."

But what they did find in the settlement of Avon amazed them.

The cry of gold is a magic one and will draw together such a conglomeration of human types and characters as nothing else will.

As the mining towns of our great West fill up with a heterogeneous mass, so did the mining settlements of the Gold Coast of Africa.

There were men there of all nationalities and from every walk of life.

The one absorbing topic, the one great theme was gold. Nothing else seemed worthy of discussion.

Gold had been mined in a desultory way in the vicinity of Avon, but the most of these people who now thronged the place were not engaged in that way.

The majority were stopping but temporarily there, as it was a halt-

ing place on the long journey into the interior, where fortunes were made in a day, and where were the big gold fields.

In the Ashantee land was the greater part of the precious metal, and thither they were bound.

The appearance of the Phaeton in the town created a sensation.

It was instantly surrounded by a large crowd, who were disposed to ask all sorts of questions.

But very politically the travelers forebore to answer these, unless evasively.

So the party were regarded as a company of prospectors with a queer electric propelled vehicle for a means of transportation.

"It's a durned queer craft," said one man, who might have been an American, "and I don't know as I blame 'em, fer they're safe from any Ashantee javelins, or the bullets of any other foe."

The people in Avon were a mixture seldom seen in one place.

Every nationality on the earth, one might say, was represented, from the Cape of Good Hope to the shores of the China Sea, and thence southward to Cape Horn.

All were gold hunters.

In all this great crowd, how was it possible to find a clew to the location of the Morden Mine, or how were they to find Tony Biglin?

It looked like a dubious task, but Frank Reade, Jr., was in earnest. He would not abandon his purpose.

Seelah Sharpe was indefatigable.

He searched the town from one end to the other, shadowed all suspects, and generally worked hard for a clew. But not the slightest was to be obtained.

If Biglin was in Avon or had come there as yet, he had left no trace behind him.

"Perhaps he has gone on into the interior," said Sharpe. "A day or two ago a large party left here for Coomasie, to trade with the Ashantees."

"He must have arrived here before us," said Frank.

"There is a possibility that he has not arrived yet."

This uncertainty was damaging to the plans of the travelers.

If Biglin had really arrived at Avon and gone on into the interior they were certainly wasting time here.

On the other hand if he was yet to put in an appearance it would be much better to await his coming.

And thus they philosophized. In the meanwhile the denizens of Avon began to wax more and more curious as to the mission of this curious party of travelers and why they were lingering here.

As is usually the case in mining or frontier towns law is little known and popular opinion rules.

There was in Avon an element not uncommon in such places of the tough kind. The cupidity of this set was aroused.

They banded together and discussed the Phaeton and its crew. At length it was deemed a brilliant exploit to press the Phaeton into service for a pleasure trip over the green plains.

This idea took possession of the rough bravos and a move was made to carry it out.

Forewarned is forearmed, and it was fortunate for our friends that they were forewarned. Sharpe fathomed the purpose of the ruffians and communicated it to Frank.

"It is to be expected," said the young inventor; "this is a lawless region, and it is each man for himself. Well, we will give them a hot reception."

And the young inventor laughed.

"I think we had better leave the place while we can," said Sharpe apprehensively. "I am sure we shall have bloodshed."

"Not a bit of it," replied Frank. "I will guarantee that there is no blood spilled. Leave it with me."

"Very well; I have confidence in you, Frank."

Barney and Pomp grinned.

"Golly, I don't flink dey want fo' to boffer Marse Frank berry much," said Pomp.

"Bejabbers, I wudn't be in their shoes," averred Barney.

"Oh, we won't do anything to them," laughed Frank. "Not unless they do something to us."

"A very good proviso!" declared Sharpe. "Well, I will coast around and find out just when they meditate making the attack."

And he proceeded to do so.

He visited the town and frequented all the drinking places in a close disguise.

He heard, as a result, the whole plan. It was the topic of the hour.

The detective gathered in all the information that he could and chuckled in high glee.

"It will be a surprise to them when they know that we are prepared for them," he muttered. "I hope it will be a good lesson."

He returned at once to the Phaeton with his information. The shades of night were falling.

"Well, Frank," he said, as he came aboard, "I have got all the news. The gang intend to capture us to-night at midnight."

"We will be ready," said Frank, with a grim smile.

## CHAPTER V.

### INTO THE ASHANTEE COUNTRY.

A few daring and evil spirits were responsible for this attempt to capture the Phaeton.

In such communities as Avon where law is not known, such ruffians generally hold undisputed sway. Their influence is potent.

The gang which had set out under the lead of a few projectors numbered fully a hundred.

This would have seemed a sufficient force to overwhelm the defenders of the Phaeton, and ordinarily this would have been true.

Had it been a case of life or death, the deadly dynamite gun would have been employed.

But Frank was satisfied to simply repulse the gang and not take the lives of any.

"I don't want to kill any of them," he said, "but I shall try and make them powerful sick."

At this the others could not help but laugh.

"How will you do that, Frank?" asked Sharpe.

"You shall see!"

Under Frank's directions now several coils of almost invisible wire were brought out.

Barney and Pomp proceeded to make a circle with this wire not more than twenty yards from the Phaeton.

The wire was put on stakes or pins about a foot from the ground.

Another circle was made ten feet beyond that, and so on until five circles were completed.

This made a perfect network of wires about the vehicle. These were connected with the dynamos.

Frank did not put on current enough to take human life, but sufficient to give one a stirring shock in coming in contact with the wires.

Then in case the attacking force should pass the wires he had connections made with the steel railing which extended around the body of the Phaeton.

"An army of men could not get aboard!" he cried. "The Phaeton is bullet proof and unless they bring a cannon to bear upon us we are safe."

"There is no danger of that," declared the detective, "for there is not a cannon in Avon."

"Then we shall certainly repulse the gang."

"I hope we shall."

By this time darkness had shut thickly down, and as there was no moon this was intense.

Considering the fact that they were expecting an enemy's attack the voyagers were in gay spirits.

The balmy African air was much to be enjoyed, and until a late hour they sat out on deck.

Frank sang some delicious ballads with his rich tenor voice, Sharpe played the Jew's-harp melodiously, and Barney gave some selections on the fiddle, while Pomp brought out his banjo.

It was a genuine concert on the forward platform of the Phaeton.

And all the while down in the village preparations were going on for the attack on the Phaeton.

At the hour of midnight one hundred masked men, armed and equipped, emerged from one of the shanties which adorned the main street and marched silently to the outskirts of the town.

An excited crowd followed at some distance.

If the occupants of the Phaeton had any sympathizers in the town they were discreetly silent.

Up in the darkness the attacking party crept until within one hundred yards of the Phaeton.

Then they let out a yell and started for the vehicle.

The Phaeton had been in absolute darkness until this moment.

Now, however, the search-light's glare shot full into the face of the attacking party.

At first its blinding brilliancy staggered them, but they rushed on. It would have been better for them if they had retreated.

There was a sudden shock and stifled yells.

Dark forms went bounding into the air and rolled over upon the ground. A literal heap of them were struggling and squirming over the tingling wires.

It is needless to say that the attack ended in a complete rout. The astonished and discomfited ruffians retreated in hot haste as soon as they could recover.

Some of them, in anger, fired their pistols at the Phaeton.

The bullets rattled against the pilot house, but did no damage.

"On my word," cried Sharpe, angrily, "that is not polite. I'd give them a volley back."

"No," replied Frank; "I am satisfied. We have got the best of them, and that is enough. If we opened fire we might kill some of them, and that would be bad."

"They deserve it."

"Undoubtedly, but it is much better to let them go."

And Frank's wise counsel prevailed. The effect of this repulse upon the denizens of Avon was remarkable.

There was a revulsion of feeling, and those who had instigated the affair were brought into decided disrepute.

In fact numberless free fights ensued, and the tide of popular opinion turned in favor of the Phaeton's crew.

"Just what I expected," said Frank, nonchalantly. "We took the best way of settling those chaps. Well, let us waste no farther time in Avon."

"Then you think we had better go on to the gold fields?" asked Sharpe.

"Yes."

"And trust to finding Biglin there?"

"I think so. It is safe to assume that he has gone thither."

"Well, I think so, too."

So preparations were at once put under way to carry out this move. Before the natives had fully time to realize it, the Electric Phaeton had departed from their midst.

Frank had studied maps of the country carefully, and was convinced that by following the base of this mountain range, he would be enabled to reach the principal diggings as easily as any way.

While the Phaeton was so constructed that it could easily climb any mountains, yet more rapid progress could be made on the level.

So the voyagers kept along over level plains, and through smooth valleys, skirting timber belts, marshes and jungles, as much as possible.

They were now properly in the Ashantee country.

"We might run up to Coomassie, and pay King Prampah a visit," said Frank, "but I am afraid we might have trouble with him. They say that his tastes are capricious, and he might take a great notion to the Phaeton."

"In that case, you might feel compelled to give it to him, eh?" laughed Sharpe.

"It is possible."

"Then I think we will give King Prampah a wide berth."

"But we are in his dominions, and may be called upon to pay him tribute of some kind."

"Of course we will do that."

"I will send him my respects," said Frank; "that is the best I have."

Thus they jested and apprehended little danger. In fact there was only one thing Frank ever feared with the machine and that was a battery of guns.

"Small arms can have no terror for us," he said; "but a cannon is our destruction."

The country was now of the wildest and roughest description.

There was no longer the least particle of doubt but that they were in Africa. The torrid heat, the tropical foliage, and the beasts and birds of the jungle were all in evidence.

The wild beasts were extremely shy, however, and slunk out of sight as the Phaeton appeared.

But lions and leopards were seen, and any number of hyenas or wolves of the jungle.

After two days journeying without encountering any sign of human habitation Frank selected a narrow, high walled pass in the mountain range and entered it.

Upon the other side he expected to come upon the gold fields, so all were on the qui vive.

Thus far no sign of human being had been seen.

But now the first thrilling incident occurred.

Frank and Sharpe were in the pilot-house, when suddenly the detective clutched the young inventor's arm.

"Look!" he gasped.

Both beheld what was at the moment a surprising object. High up on a spur of rock, jutting out over the gorge, there was a human figure.

It was a remarkable specimen of a human being.

It was not a white man as it was easy to see. But a black, almost naked save for a breech clout of leopard skin.

Yet the black's form was outlined against the sky in bold relief, and he was a literal giant.

He wore an enormous headdress and carried a shield and javelin or assegai. He was intently watching the Phaeton.

It was to him undoubtedly an astounding spectacle.

It was safe to say that it was the first time he had ever seen a vehicle of the size and kind, and therefore his astonishment was pardonable.

"It is an Ashantee!" exclaimed Frank. "We are apt to have trouble now."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sharpe; "then you do not believe that they will be friendly?"

"I doubt it. At least we must not be off our guard. They are a treacherous crew."

The Ashantee warrior seemed suddenly to recover himself. He placed his hand to his mouth and gave a strange wild cry.

It was instantly answered from a hundred different quarters. Upon the canyon walls above myriads of the blacks appeared.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frank, "I told you so. We are in for it now."

"Then you think they will attack us?" asked Sharpe.

"There is no telling."

The detective took a repeating rifle out of the rack. Barney and Pomp followed his example. It was certainly well to be prepared.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A FIGHT WITH THE ASHANTRES.

THE Ashantee warriors were as thick as flies upon the walls of the gorge.

They were evidently too much consumed with curiosity to at once think of a hostile demonstration.

This was just what Frank wanted, for it gave him time to prepare and decide upon a plan of action.

At first he had thought of taking a back track and running out of the gorge, which might become a death trap for them.

For it would have been an easy matter for the Ashantee warriors to have rolled stones down upon the machine and crush it.

But they did not.

To the contrary, they began to climb down into the gorge and make signs of a friendly nature.

"Hello!" exclaimed Sharpe. "That is good. They evidently mean us well."

"I should say so," said Frank, warily; "but keep an eye out."

"Can we do better than treat with them?"

"No. We shall be compelled to do that."

The Ashantee warriors had come down into the gorge, and were several hundred in number.

They seemed very peacefully inclined, and persistently bent upon making the near acquaintance of the voyagers.

Indeed they came boldly up to the Phaeton. Frank foresaw the meaning of this, and raising the sash of the pilot-house window shouted:

"Hello there! Who speaks English?"

The Ashantees halted and began to chatter and jabber among themselves excitedly.

Then one of them advanced with a simpering bow, and said:

"Me speak Inglis. Me say so. Speak to me."

"Good!" cried Frank. "What do you want with us?"

"Tobacco!"

At this all the natives cheered and danced furiously. Frank opened a locker and took out some plugs of chewing tobacco.

These he tossed out into the crowd. Instantly there was a scramble.

After this was over there was a demand for more. But Frank curtly refused it, whereupon the spokesman of the gang ventured again.

"Inglis man want heap gold? Want me find it fo' him?"

"Well," said Frank. "Where is it to be found?"

The black pointed over the mountain wall.

"Heaps over dar!" he said, "b'long to King Prampah. No touch it. Cut head off. Not for Inglis man. Over there more," pointing in the other direction, "find it fo' Inglis man gib black man whisky."

"I have no whisky for you!" replied Frank, bluntly, "but if you will show me the way to the gold fields where the white men are, I will give you some more tobacco."

At this there was a discussion among the black warriors.

Then the spokesman said again:

"Let us come into white man's cart? We talk, tell heap news?"

"Whew!" exclaimed Sharpe, "they haven't any gall, have they?"

"Well, they don't come it over us that way," said Frank, "they are going to give us trouble."

"You think so?"

"Oh, sure!"

"Then we had better get ready."

"By all means."

Barney and Pomp were already armed with Winchesters; the detective did the same.

Frank quietly made the secret connections between the wagon rail and the dynamos. A touch of an electric key and the current would be made.

"If they can pass that," he muttered, "then they are welcome to come aboard, that's all."

But he had no idea that they could do this.

Frank made haste now to reply to the black spokesman. What he said was decisive.

"No, my black friend," he said. "You cannot come into our wagon. As we are in a hurry, you will also get out of the way and let us pass."

The black spokesman turned, and excitedly conveyed this statement to the others.

It at once changed the situation most remarkably.

The blacks all set up a fiendish yell. Like black fiends they swarmed toward the Phaeton.

"Steady now, all!" cried Frank. "The ball is opened!"

The Ashantee warriors were too near to allow of the use of the dynamite gun, else Frank could have swept them into eternity instantly. All knew what it meant to have the black rascals gain the deck of the Phaeton.

They were merciless, and a massacre would be the result. But they were not given the chance.

The moment they grasped the rail, they leaped back and rolled in senseless heaps upon the ground. The deadly electric current repelled them with ease.

"Great Jupiter!" gasped the detective, "don't that make 'em sick! Look at 'em drop!"

Indeed, they were swept from the heavily charged rail like flies. All the while Barney and Pomp were pouring in a deadly fire.

Human courage and sinew could not stand against such odds. The Ashantees were repulsed.

They retreated to the cover of the rocks, and for a while the way was cleared for the Phaeton.

And there was need for quick action, for most deadly peril was imminent.

A number of the blacks were already rolling a huge boulder to the verge of the defile to drop upon the Phaeton.

If it should strike it then the fate of all would be sealed.

The expedition would have come to an inglorious end.

But Frank pressed the motor key just in time.

The Phaeton darted forward, and the boulder fell just in the rear of it. Up the gorge the machine rushed.

Some of the blacks fell under the wheels, but the result was that

the Phaeton came out at the other end of the defile into an open country.

Boundless plains extended as far as the eye could reach. As the machine rolled out upon the level ground, it gained fresh impetus and danger ceased.

The Ashantees were left behind and out of sight in a twinkling. In an hour's time the mountain range was but a speck on the horizon.

The voyagers were now in a different sort of country.

There were rolling uplands, little breaks and rivers with shallow waters and sandy beds.

"This looks like auriferous soil," cried Frank. "I think we are in the gold fields."

They had just forded a small stream and gained an eminence.

"And so we are!" cried Sharpe excitedly. "Look!"

Not five miles distant the curling smoke of campfires was seen. Also the white gleams of tents and even the green thatch of hastily erected huts.

Down the eminence the machine went and at the base, came to a small brook, and in the sands two rough bearded men were cradling gold.

Frank instantly brought the Phaeton to a halt.

"Hello, friends!" he cried through the pilot-house window.

The two miners stared blankly at the strange vehicle. One of them managed to make reply:

"Hello, strangers! Have ye cum far?"

"From Avon and the coast," replied Frank.

The miners dropped their implements and came eagerly forward.

"Do ye bring any letters?" they asked. "What the deuce is this?"

A new kind of a stage without horses, eh? How does she run?" All these queries and more besides Frank hastened to answer to the best of his ability.

Then he learned that they had really reached the Ashantee gold fields.

One of the many mining camps was near at hand. When asked about new arrivals one of the men scratched his head, and replied:

"I reckon there were four or five came last night. Don't know anybody by the name of Biglin. Go down there to the camp and ask the boss assayer. He kin tell ye. Yes, I reckon they struck out tew ther north'ard somewhar for a new prospect. Reckon they'd have done about as well right yer."

"Much obliged to you," said Frank. "We will go down to the camp."

The miners stared at the Phaeton as it rolled by.

"We are evidently objects of great curiosity," said Sharpe; "just to think of taking the Phaeton for a stage coach."

"It was natural that they should," said Frank; "this is probably the first wheeled vehicle that ever came into these parts."

Every moment now the camp drew nearer.

A few miners were idly lounging about the place. But the majority of them were prospecting.

The assayer was a queer old fellow with spectacles and a pipe. He answered the questions curtly.

"Yas," he said, "three men registered here yisterday. They have gone up into the Pyramid Hills. One of them has a pocket up there I think. I've got their names on the register."

He hobbled into the little cabin, and came out with a couple of sheets of paper pinned together.

On these were the names of the three prospectors, who had gone on into the Pyramid Hills.

"Their names are Clark Donovan, Sam Basset, an' Tony Biglin. They're all from Accra."

Frank turned and gripped Sharpe's hand.

"We're on the right track," he said. "Luck is with us!"

"You're right!" cried the detective. "Now, for the Pyramid Hills. Without doubt that is where the mine is."

But before the Phaeton could be started ahead, a startling thing occurred.

There was the thud of flying hoofs, and up dashed a horse and rider. The horse was of a part Arab breed, peculiar to the country, and the rider was of such unusual appearance, that he at once claimed the attention of all.

"They have gone thither," was the assayer's reply.

"I thank you."

The young man turned to remount his horse, but a sudden thought came to him.

"Wait," he said. "Can you give me their names?"

"Yes," replied the assayer, "they were Clark Donovan, Sam Basset and Tony Biglin."

"The same," muttered the rider. "I must overtake them."

All this Frank Reade, Jr., and Sharpe had heard as if in a dream. Not until this moment did Frank act.

Then he cried:

"Wait, sir. I want to speak with you!"

The rider turned in a half startled way and his eyes flashed. While his hand involuntarily went to his pistol butt.

"Well!" he said, looking at Frank with strange, wild eyes.

"I want to know your name."

"I decline to give it."

The young rider made another movement to mount. But Frank cried:

"At least let us compare notes. We are in quest of the same three men."

The look of astonishment in the rider's eyes was deep.

"You seek them?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Ah, but your mission—well, and what do you seek them for?"

"One of them, Biglin, is under suspicion for a great crime committed in the United States some time ago."

A hoarse cry escaped the other.

"You are right," he cried, "and an innocent man suffers for it. But who are you?"

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., inventor of the Electric Phaeton, and this is Mr. Seelah Sharpe, detective from New York. He has extradition papers for Biglin."

"It will be hard to enforce law in this country," said the rider, ironically.

"Well," said Frank, "it is evident that you are upon the same quest as ourselves. Will you not join company with us?"

"I prefer to travel alone."

Frank only smiled.

"I can understand how you feel," he said, "but there is no need of that. We are warm friends of yours."

"What do you mean?"

"I will tell you. You decline to tell us who you are, but I am quite sure that I know. You are an escaped prisoner from Sing Sing prison. You are Alfred Morden."

The tableau was one worthy of the dramatic stage.

The wild eyed rider stood like a statue. He groaned as if in despair.

"Are all my hopes to be again blasted?" he exclaimed.

"No!" cried Frank, impetuously—"not if you will listen to reason and accept my offer of friendship. We all know you to be an innocent man, and even if we do not bring the guilty man to justice, we will do nothing to restore you to your hated prison life. Believe us, we will help you."

Alfred Morden gave a cry of wild joy and staggered forward.

"Do you mean that?" he cried. "It is no decoy—no trap?"

"Never!" cried Frank. "You shall see. Let me tell you the promise I made to your mother."

With which the young inventor told the fugitive all—how he had cared for his distressed and loving mother, and had undertaken, at his own expense, to find the rascal Biglin.

To all of which Alfred Morden listened rapidly, and then cried with all his heart:

"Heaven bless you, sir. You are truly a noble friend. But when I heard of Biglin's rascality, I could no longer stay behind prison bars. I felt bound to risk public censure, all to have my revenge upon him."

"You cannot be blamed," said Frank, "although you were not altogether discreet. But all will come out right, I am sure."

"If we can make Biglin confess then there will be hope."

"I believe that he will be compelled to when we confront him with the evidence against him."

"So do I," agreed Sharpe.

More conversation followed in which even the keeper of the hotel and assay office participated.

"Indeed," he said, "I think I heard the three rascals discussing the gold claim you speak of. They had some kind of a plan—"

"That is it," cried Alfred; "the plan is mine and was stolen."

"Enough!" said Seelah Sharpe. "We are plainly wasting time here, gentlemen."

"Let us be off then," cried Frank.

They had no clew to guide them, but the old assayer showed them the course to the Pyramid Hills.

Then the Phaeton bowled away over the plain.

Numberless placers and shafts were passed, and hundreds of miners were seen in the beds of streams and basins engaged in cradling gold.

But the Phaeton boomed on until these were left behind, and they entered a region which had plainly not been greatly explored as yet. For all they knew this region might be even richer in gold than the one they had left.

But it was not a prospecting tour our friends were upon, but a man hunt. It was to see a great wrong righted.

A range of hills loomed up before them now.

That these were the Pyramid Hills was very evident from their shape. The Phaeton bore down for them.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN ADDITION TO THE PARTY.

TALL and slender, and pallid as a ghost was the rider, who was really quite a young man.

His eyes were hollow and restless and deep set in their sockets, with the stamp of one who had suffered from intense mental strain and sorrow.

He threw himself from the horse and touched his wide brimmed hat.

He was armed and equipped as a miner. But it could plainly be seen that he was not of the same stamp.

He flashed but a glance at the Phaeton and its voyagers. He spoke hurriedly to the assayer.

"You are the keeper of the hostelry here?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the old man.

"Did three men stop with you within two days? They were bound for the Pyramid Hills."

But darkness was at hand and Frank decided that it was wisest and best to make camp. Little could be accomplished at night.

So a good spot was selected in the verge of a deep jungle and here the Phaeton was brought to a stop.

There was a spring of clear water near and Pomp brought some of it aboard in a bucket.

There was a path which led down to the spring and the darky mentioned this to Frank.

"Golly, Marse Frank, p'raps it am a fac' dat we am nigh some plantashun, sah, or some village ob de Africkans."

"Oh, I guess not," said Frank, nonchalantly; "it is probably made by wild animals going down to drink."

Night came on dark and silent. There was no moon and the gloom was impenetrable.

Not until the black mantle had thickly settled down was the grave-like silence broken.

Then the distant call of wild beasts from the jungle was plainly to be heard. The scream of the jackal and the sullen roar of the prowling lion was blended.

Pomp scratched his woolly head and remarked:

"Ise mighty glad I ain' out in dat jungle dis moment. Golly, wouldn't dat lion jes' make a meal ob one, eh?"

"Begorra, it wud be a tough one he'd make off you," put in Barney with a chuckle.

This caused Pomp to throw up his head and sniff scornfully.

"Yo' fink dat am a berry smaht remark, sah, but it ain't a bit smaht at all, sah."

"I take notice it made yez smart a bit though," averred Barney.

"Don' yo' git gay wif me, I'ish. I don' feel a bit loike foolin' wif yo'."

"Begorra, I'll have me say an' the devil a bit care I fer you or anybody else," blustered Barney. "Shure it's not intimidating me yez will be."

And so retort followed retort until the two jokers got apparently in dead earnest.

Then one thing followed another until Barney got Pomp fairly mad. The darky made a bolt for the cabin.

Barney put out his foot, and Pomp stumbled over it. This was the climax, to be sure.

The darky sprang to his feet, and there was a desperately angry light in his eyes as he shook his woolly head like a mad bull and cried:

"Hi dar! look out fo' yo'sef, chille—Ise a-comin'!"

Down went his head, and like a battering ram he shot forward.

Barney dodged, and—

Crash!

Pomp's head struck the framework of the door. It knocked the darky back a bit, but it was only a temporary hindrance.

The blow would have killed an ordinary man. Barney thought it the funniest thing he had ever seen.

He fairly collapsed with laughter, and this sealed his fate.

Quick as a flash Pomp turned and made another dash for him. This time Barney was unable to get out of the way.

The darky's head struck him full in the stomach. For a moment the Celt thought the world was full of brilliant scintillations.

He went down in a heap and Pomp on top of him.

As soon as he could recover his breath he grappled with the darky. Then followed a lively tussle.

How it might have ended it was not easy to say, but at that moment a startling cry came to their ears.

It was Seelah Sharpe's voice. The detective was on the forward platform.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Come quick! There is danger here."

Frank Reade, Jr., and Alfred Morden, who were in the cabin also, rushed out. Frank was instantly by the detective's side.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Sh!" said Sharpe, shrinking back behind the dasher, "there's a hundred of those native blacks in the jungle there. I believe that they mean to attack us."

It was a startling statement.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE GRASSY LAKE.

For a moment Frank was dumfounded. Then an incident brought his wits back.

There was a sharp ringing sound over his head, and an object fell at his feet.

The detective picked it up. It was a javelin.

It had been flung from the darkness, and struck the wall of the pilot-house just over their heads.

If it had struck either one of them, it would have terminated his career instantly, for there was no doubt that it was poisoned.

"I think we had better get into the cabin," said Frank. "Look out, everybody! Swing the search-light into the jungle, Barney!"

"All roight, sor!"

The next moment the glare of the light showed the very depths of the jungle before them, and the explorers were astounded.

The place seemed to literally swarm with black forms. It was a veritable nest of the Ashantee warriors.

The voyagers sought the security of the cabin none too quick.

A great shower of javelins came rattling about, but did no harm.

Then a chorus of savage war cries made the night air hideous.

Frank hesitated, somewhat at a loss to know just what to do.

He had the choice of making a fight or backing the Phaeton out and beating a retreat.

The latter move was much against his principle, and yet he was loath to take the lives of so many of the black wretches.

"Begorra, will we give them the electric gun, sor?" cried Barney.

"Wait," Frank said, in perplexity. But he had little time left in which to decide.

However, he made up his mind with sudden impulse.

He rushed to the keyboard and started the electric engines.

"What are you going to do, Frank?" asked Sharp, the detective.

"I believe I'll avoid a battle if I can," said Frank.

"You cannot."

"Why?"

"They have hemmed us in on every hand. Look yonder!"

Frank looked out over the plain, and gave a violent start.

A great line of fire was running through the dry grasses.

It was gaining headway every moment and rushing toward the jungle.

They were truly hemmed in.

The blacks were upon one side, the fire upon the other. It was a question between the blacks or the fire.

"By gracious!" exclaimed Frank in dismay; "we are forced into it. There is no possibility of running through that line of fire."

"Our situation is a desperate one at best," cried Alfred Morden.

"The fire will run right through the jungle."

"What is beyond the jungle?" asked Frank.

But of course none in the party knew. It seemed as if a swamp must exist on the other side. In that case to cut into the jungle would be risky.

The affair was fast assuming a most thrilling aspect.

Madly the fire gained headway. To add to it all the blacks were close at hand in their attack.

Frank drew a deep breath.

His blood was up now, and he was angry.

"Well," he cried, "if they will have it, let them take the consequences. Here goes then!"

With which he rushed forward to the electric gun.

The blacks had massed not fifty yards distant, and were just starting to the attack.

Frank aimed the gun into their very midst. They were directly in the course he must take, and of course he was warranted in sweeping them from his path.

So he did not hesitate to fire.

The dynamite shell struck full in their front rank, exploding with terrific force and noise.

The effect was fearful. The air was filled with flying debris and black forms. The loss of life must have been great.

How great it was never possible to learn.

For Frank sprang to the keyboard and started the electric engines. Forward sprang the Phaeton.

As it did so black forms came yelling and fiercely struggling about it.

The blacks were evidently in dead earnest in their attack. They meant to capture the vehicle if they could.

But the Phaeton brushed them aside like flies. Barney and Pomp gave those on the deck a hot reception with their Winchesters, and into the jungle plunged the Phaeton.

Frank pressed a spring and threw out the keen knives upon the hubs and axles.

These fairly mowed a fearful path through the brittle cane and reeds. It was a desperate move.

The white men had only one chance and one hope. This was that they would find safety upon the other side of the jungle.

All depended upon this.

Into the dense growth went the terrible machine. The great canes went down and were cut up like grass before the scythe of a mowing machine.

On and on pushed the Phaeton.

The fire came roaring up now close in their rear. It seemed as if it must overtake them.

"My soul! I am afraid we are done for, Frank!" cried Seelah Sharpe.

"We are lost!" groaned Morden.

But Frank set his teeth firmly and said:

"Not yet!"

The next moment a terrible obstacle appeared in their path. It was a group of banyan trees, deep rooted in the heart of the jungle.

The banyan tree is a curious growth. Its branches, extending outward many feet, send other branches down to the earth to take powerful root, making a complete network of strong roots and covering many yards square.

To drive the Phaeton through these was impossible. To go around them was not feasible.

Dismay seized upon all. The mighty wall of fire was close behind. The Ashantee warriors had vanished.

But Frank Reade, Jr. did not lose his head.

He was always to be depended upon in an emergency. Quick as a flash he said to Barney:

"Take the steering wheel. When I give the signal go ahead."

"I will, sir!"

Then out onto the platform the young inventor sprang. It was but a moment's work for him to sight the electric gun.

He threw a projectile into the breech and fired it. There was a deafening roar and the great banyan tree's tough arms were rooted up and hurled aside as if by giant hands.

Once more Frank sent the powerful dynamite among the tough roots. They could not withstand such rending power.

Up they came and an opening was literally riven through the powerful roots. Then Barney sent the Phaeton ahead.

There was not a moment to spare. The Phaeton came out upon the other side of the jungle. But it seemed for a moment as if it was only from one death trap into another.

For its wheels ran deep into water. Tall sawgrass and reeds rose above the roof.

But Frank knew that this was their salvation. Quick as a flash he sprung to the keyboard and brought the machine to a halt.

It floated in a dozen feet of water now in a sort of channel between the reeds. The search-light was sent flaring down this by Pomp.

They had run into an overflowed tract or swampy lake. They were now safe from the fire.

It was crackling and dying out behind them. In less than an hour every ember had expired at the water's edge.

Sharpe and Morden were not a little anxious as to their position.

"Will we ever be able to haul the Phaeton out of here, Frank?" the detective asked.

"Pshaw! of course we will," said Frank; "the Phaeton was constructed with a view to fording rivers and lakes and will float and can be navigated anywhere. There are paddles which can be applied to the wheels."

This greatly relieved the fears of the two passengers.

It was decided to remain in the saw-grass until daybreak. Frank more than half anticipated another attack from the Ashantees.

But it did not come.

Daybreak came at last. Then from the roof of the Phaeton they were able to see over the top of the saw-grass the broad waters of an inland sea.

So broad was it that the opposite shore was out of sight. There was hardly a breeze to ripple its surface.

Frank saw the Pyramid Hills to the northward and said:

"I believe our nearest way to reach them is to cut across this upper end of the lake."

"So do I!" agreed Sharpe, and the opinion was unanimous.

So it was decided to cross the lake at this point. The paddles were put on the wheels and the start made.

And this revealed a curious fact.

The bottom of the lake was visible everywhere, and was covered with grass. The water was nowhere over a dozen feet in depth.

It was easy to understand, therefore, that this great lake was a newly made one, and the result of some sort of a great overflow.

Through this the Phaeton made its way slowly but surely. It was near the hour of noon, when they ran up into a little inlet which was blest with a hard gravelly shore.

A surging torrent of water here came rushing down from the direction of the hills.

It was evidently a river which was fed by some higher body of water in the Pyramid Hills, and which had suddenly risen so as to overflow the lower level.

"Shall we go ashore here?" asked the detective.

"Yes," replied Frank, "and now I believe that the serious part of our undertaking has begun."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE VALLEY IN THE HILLS.

FRANK'S words were prophetic.

The serious part of the undertaking had just begun. From this point on events were to assume a thrilling and most rapid development.

The Phaeton quickly ran ashore.

High and dry upon the grassy plain, the paddles were removed from the axles, and Barney and Pomp spent an hour of hard work drying and oiling the spokes and the under part of the machine.

This precaution was taken wisely to prevent rust or corrosion. Then all clambered aboard, and straight for the Pyramid Hills the course was set.

Every moment they loomed up nearer; every moment the adventurers grew more eager.

Young Morden was perhaps the most deeply affected.

"Somewhere in those hills," he said, "my father hunted for gold, and there contracted the fever which was the means of his death."

His eyes filled as he went on:

"And somewhere in those hills is the fruit of his labor—the gold which justly belongs to my mother. Before I turn my face homeward I will secure it for her and also my own vindication."

It was a resolute vow.

How it was kept we have yet to see.

The Pyramid Hills were seen to well merit their appellation. They

were solid blocks of ragged quartz, and with four steep sides towering to a peak, were indeed pyramidal.

That there should be gold in those rocky fastnesses did not by any means seem strange.

Between the hills there was a deep valley, the like of which could hardly be duplicated anywhere on the globe.

Great towering heaps of marl and towers and fantastic figures of sandstone were everywhere. It was like traveling among the ruins of some strange and outlandish city.

One might easily have imagined himself upon another planet, so unnatural did everything seem. The shadows were deep and somber, and, indeed, gave the voyagers a chill.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Seelah Sharpe, "this beats all the places I ever got into! What sort of a region do you call this, Frank?"

"It is curious indeed," agreed the young inventor.

"How do you explain the presence of such formations?"

"Well," said Frank, reflectively, "I think it is doubtless the fact that once this valley was the course of a powerful river. As it wore its way down through the soft earth it left these pinnacles and crags, until finally getting to its level it disappeared itself. There is a similar instance in the Bad Lands of Dakota."

"Well, it is indeed wonderful!" cried Morden. "Ah, wait a moment, Frank."

The Phaeton came to a stop. The youth leaped out and rushed to a little rivulet which flowed through the gravelly bed.

He stooped down and scooped up some of the sands. Back to the vehicle he came.

"Gold!" he cried. "Why, there is oceans of it here! We can wash thousands of dollars out of that gravelly bed!"

This was true.

Gold seemed to be present everywhere. All that was needed was a little labor to extract it from the soil.

But the errand of the travelers was not wholly to wash gold. The Phaeton was soon on its way again.

For some distance it ran on through the haunted valley, as they were pleased to call it.

Then they came into what seemed to be a blind pocket or sort of coulee in the mountain side, massive walls of rock closing in upon three sides.

Further progress in this direction seemed impossible, but just as the Phaeton was about to turn Frank gave a little cry:

"Stop her, Barney!"

The Celt obeyed.

Then Frank leaped down from the deck and began to examine some marks in the damp sands.

"A trail!" he exclaimed.

In a moment young Morden was by his side. True enough, there were footprints in the sand.

Three men had entered the "coulee," and their steps led directly toward the blank wall of its extremity. Here they came to a stop.

For a moment the trailers were puzzled.

"That is queer," muttered Morden; "can they have climbed the wall?"

"Wait!" said Frank.

By the merest chance his eye had caught an object in the white quartz of the ledge.

A glance was enough.

There was chiseled in the wall of rock a number, 54. Morden gave a great cry.

"That is the clew to the mine," he cried. "No. 54 was in the old plan left by my father! Ah, now we have it!"

He placed his hand upon a slab of rock which was so deftly placed against the wall that it seemed a part of it. But it covered a crevice just large enough to admit the body of a man.

The secret of the mysterious trail was out.

One moment only did young Morden hesitate. Then he squeezed into the crevice and disappeared from sight.

Frank followed more slowly. He saw that he was in a cleft between high walls which met overhead.

At the other end of this cleft there was a gleam of daylight. He pushed on following Morden.

The cavern passage was hardly one hundred feet long and broadened as it extended.

Then the two explorers saw a curious little gem of a valley deep in the heart of the quartz hills.

It was carpeted with green and yet a small river ran brawling through it, coming out of a cavernous opening upon one side and disappearing into one upon the other.

For a moment they gazed spellbound upon the wonderful scene.

Precipitous and inaccessible walls of rock hemmed this curious little pit or sink hole in the mountains. There was no method of ingress or egress save the one they had used.

"This is the place," breathed Morden; "how fortunate that we have stumbled upon it so quickly. This is just as described by my father and according to him it is a literal treasure vault."

"We are indeed fortunate," said Frank, "but—"

Before he could say more, Morden clutched his arm.

"By jove, look there!"

The gleam of a red shirt was seen among a heap of river quartz at one end of the valley.

Then a man's head and shoulders rose into view, and the ring of a pick-axe was heard.

"It is Biglin!" declared Morden, breathlessly. "Let us go over and talk with him."

Frank would have restrained the daring youth, but Morden had already stepped into view.

He marched boldly up to the quartz pit, in which the miners were at work. Biglin dropped his pick and his jaw fell.

The two rough-bearded men with him also looked dumfounded, and for a moment it was a tableau well depicted by an artist.

For a full minute no one spoke. Morden's terrible eyes were fixed full upon the man who had so deeply wronged him.

"Well, Tony," he said finally in a gritting voice, "there is always a day of reckoning, isn't there?"

"You," gasped Biglin in sheer amazement, "how did you come here?"

"Rather, let me ask how did you come here?"

Biglin drew a deep breath and in a measure recovered himself.

"Why should I not be here?" he said with cool assurance. "Who am I accountable to?"

"To me!"

"I fail to see it!"

"You lie!" said Morden, hotly. "Coward! traitor! false friend and thief. It was your perfidy that placed me in prison."

"How did you get out of there?" asked Biglin, coolly.

"I broke my way out to come and demand of you a full confession and the righting of my wrongs."

"You are crazy, Alfred," said Biglin, with cool assurance. "I don't know what you are talking about. I haven't wronged you in any way—"

"Hold on, Tony Biglin!" said Morden, strongly. "Dare you deny that you were not the real robber of the bank, and that you placed the evidence in my room so as to convict me?"

Biglin feigned astonishment.

"Now I believe you are crazy, Alfred," he said. "I don't know what you mean."

"Dare you deny," continued Morden, "that you stole the deed and description of this mine from my aged mother, and came here to reap the fruits of the only inheritance which my father left me?"

Biglin looked blank.

"You are mad!" he said. "I know nothing about your deed nor your inheritance. Mr. Clark Donovan here is the real discoverer of this mine and induced Mr. Basset and myself to come up here and open it up. Is it not so, Donovan?"

One of the miners inclined his head in a hang dog way, and said:

"Wall, you bet!"

"So you see," said Biglin coolly, "you are off the track, Alfred. I never did you a wrong turn in my life, and if this mine was really the one your father once discovered and laid claim to, I could know nothing of it."

"However, the claim would be outlawed by this time, and we shall contest our rights to it. You see, you have made a big mistake, Alfred. I demand an apology from you, or this affair must terminate our friendship."

It seemed as if Morden was carved out of stone so rigid did he stand.

"However," continued Biglin nonchalantly, "I am glad you have got out of prison, and I will gladly extend you my help, even to giving you an interest in this mine. Now that is fair, considering your treatment of me."

"And cut my throat the first time I laid down to sleep," said Morden in a grating voice. "No, you cannot deceive me, Tony Biglin. I have come here for a reckoning with you."

Morden drew a long knife from his belt.

"There is but one way in which our score can be settled. It is your life or mine."

## CHAPTER X.

### LIVELY INCIDENTS.

It was certain that Alfred Morden was deadly in earnest. He faced the villain determinedly.

Biglin was a trifle pale.

He did not accept the challenge, but said:

"Don't be a fool, Alfred; I am not going to fight with you."

"Then restore to me my rights, and give me a full confession of your wrong doing."

"Why, you are a fool! I can never do that."

"Then it must be settled between us here. It is either your life or mine!"

All this while Frank Reade, Jr., had remained in the background, a silent listener.

He would at this moment have interposed in the affair but that Biglin made a sudden signal to his companions. Like a flash, the one named Donovan raised a pistol and fired.

Morden fell like a log, but almost in the same instant the second report of a pistol rang out, and the villain dropped his weapon with a yell of agony, a bullet having passed through his hand.

Frank Reade, Jr., had fired this shot, and with a pistol in each hand, he sprang upon a block of quartz, crying:

"Hold up, you scoundrels! Hands up, or I'll drop the both of you!"

So sudden and swift was the move, that neither Biglin nor Basset had time to draw.

Frank would have kept his word and killed them both, but they discreetly held up their hands.

For a moment he held them, as with an eagle eye.

Morden lay at his feet motionless, and a little stream of blood was trickling from under him. As near as he could see, Frank feared that he was shot through the head.

The young inventor's soul was of steel at that moment. If it was true that young Morden was murdered, he inwardly vowed that the sternest of justice should be done.

The third villain, Donovan, had fainted from the shock of his wound so that he was not to be feared.

Frank was master of the situation. But how long he could remain such he could only conjecture.

However, he opened his lips and made a shrill call.

He prayed that it might be wafted over the ridge to Barney and Pomp. If they heard it they would understand and come to his relief.

Time passed.

"Well," said Biglin, after a time. "What are you going to do about it, stranger?"

"You will see," replied Frank grimly, and he repeated his call. But fortune was with him.

It had been heard by Barney and Pomp.

Pomp was left to guard the Phaeton. Barney and Sharpe grabbed their rifles.

"Begorra, Mither Frank niver wud make that call if he didn't nade us," declared the Celt.

"Well, we will respond valiantly," declared Sharpe.

Into the cleft they dodged and quickly emerged into the little valley. They came rapidly up to the scene, which they took in at a glance.

Biglin turned deadly pale.

He saw that the game was up.

"Barney, tie those rascals up," commanded Frank.

"All right, sor!" replied the Celt, as he proceeded to execute the order. Sharpe had sprang to Morden's side.

As soon as Barney had Biglin and his companions bound, Donovan having come to, Frank turned to where Morden lay.

The detective had brought water and was dashing it in his face.

"Is it fatal?" asked the young inventor, huskily.

"Close call," replied Sharpe, laconically, "just grazed the scalp. Concussion a little severe. Ah, now he comes to."

Morden opened his eyes.

Frank was enough of a surgeon to see that happily the wound was of no importance.

In fact in a few moments Morden was upon his feet again, as well as ever, save for a dizzy head.

"But it was a close one," said Frank; "the rascal meant to kill you. A little nearer and he would have done so."

What to do with the prisoners was now the question.

Biglin's person was searched, and the stolen papers of the mine were found.

But in vain all tried to wring from him a confession of his placing the stolen bank notes in Morden's trunk.

"I'll never admit anything," he said, doggedly, "hang me, if you will."

Morden was in a quandary.

He had regained possession of his mine, but this would not solve the difficulty of his life.

How should he get the necessary evidence to convict Biglin. It certainly seemed as if there could be but one way, and that would be from his lips.

After some discussion a plan of action was agreed upon.

Donovan and Basset were disposed to cry baby, and solemnly agreed to return to the coast if given their freedom.

So they were taken aboard the Phaeton, carried forty miles upon their ways, and dropped in the plains. Biglin was, however, kept a prisoner.

Threats were of no avail.

He would not yield.

Finally he was bound securely, and left in Pomp's charge aboard the Phaeton.

Then all went prospecting in the valley with Morden.

The place was found to be a treasure trove. The young convict was very enthusiastic.

"If I can do no better," he said, "I will make a home in this part of the world and send for my mother."

"Oh," said Frank, "but it will be better to prove your innocence, if possible."

"Oh, certainly."

"Perhaps Biglin will give in."

"I pray that he will."

"What will be your first operation toward opening this mine?"

"I shall return to the coast and buy a stamp mill. Then I shall employ one hundred miners promising them good pay. That will be an arduous task but I will succeed."

"You ought to become a money king!" declared Frank.

"If I do, then so shall the rest of you!"

"Not I!" said Frank. "Thank you just the same!"

"You refuse the chance!"

"Well, there are good reasons. I have fortune enough and much that calls me back to Readstown. But, perhaps Mr. Sharpe here—"

"I am a detective no longer," said Sharpe, "save to convict this

fellow Biglin. If I succeed you may repay me with an interest in your mine, Mr Morden."

"It is a bargain," cried Morden eagerly; "all right."

They had been now four days in the valley. The Phaeton was left in the coulee with Pomp and Biglin aboard, the prospectors returning every night.

But the fourth evening they emerged from the quartz mountain to receive a stunning shock.

The Phaeton was not in the coulee. It was not in sight.

"Why, that is queer!" exclaimed Frank. "What can have possessed Pomp to go away?"

"I did not hear him speak of any such intention," said Sharpe.

"It is very strange," said Morden. "See, here are the wheel tracks."

Sure enough, there were the wheel prints of the vehicle as it rolled out of the coulee. The four very much surprised prospectors followed them out among the pinnacles and domes of the haunted valley.

The trail led on in a winding course for the entire length of the valley until the open plain was reached.

Here it was lost in the grass. The astonished prospectors looked in all directions for some sight of the vehicle. But in vain.

Here was a puzzler.

Darkness was fast coming on. Pomp's move was most inexplicable.

"Begorra there was somethin' up, yez may be sure!" declared Barney. "The naygur wud niver have gone off that way if there hadn't been."

"On my word I am inclined to believe that true!" cried Frank. "But what could have been wrong?"

"Perhaps the Ashantees have been here!" suggested Morden.

"That's so!" agreed Sharpe. "It is not at all unlikely."

"Yet they have left no trace," said Frank. "If they came into the coulee to attack the Phaeton, why did they not also come into the gold valley to attack us?"

There could be no reasonable explanation of this question. However, the fact remained that the Phaeton had gone.

There was no way but to make the best of it and await for its return. So a camp-fire was made, and the four prospectors proceeded to make themselves comfortable for the night. This was the best they could do.

## CHAPTER XI.

### POMP'S EXCITING EXPERIENCES.

BUT what of Pomp and the Phaeton, and what was the mystery of the disappearance?

It is a matter all very easily explained. When Frank took the two desperadoes, Donovan and Basset, forty miles out onto the plains and left them there, he expected that they would naturally have the courtesy and good sense to continue on to the coast.

But he made a mistake.

Neither of the rascals entertained any such an idea. They had been let into the secret of the finest gold mines in the country, and they did not intend to abandon the chance of getting a fortune from it.

Moreover, they were not by any means inclined to be disloyal to their employer and associate Biglin.

"I'm tellin', Donny old boy," said Basset, holding up his bandaged hand, "I ain't done wid them jays yet. I'll make 'em pay fer that paw an' yeu kin jist bet I will."

"I'm yures, honey," declared Donovan, with a string of oaths, "and here's right-about face. I reckon we oughter do fifteen or twenty mile a day."

"Yew bet. I say, old covey, why kain't we work our cards to down the hull gang in ther sleep an' git hold of thet electric waggin?"

"We'll try it mighty hard."

Thus plotting they kept on their way back to the hills.

The Phaeton had long since gone out of sight. There was nothing to fear from it.

The two villains kept on steadily and such good progress did they make, that on the morning of the third day they came in sight of the hills.

They had not gone hungry in the meanwhile, for Frank had been kind enough to leave good food with them to last them on their journey to the coast.

Reaching the haunted valley, they secreted themselves and watched the Phaeton assiduously.

They were not able to do anything that day or night, for somebody was constantly on guard.

But they drew near enough to overhear conversations, and learn that their compatriot, Biglin, was a prisoner on board.

"That settles it, old pal," said Donovan. "We've got to git aboard there an' do that nigger up ter-morrow. Thet's all we've got to do."

"We'll take him when ther others are off prospectin'."

"Jes' so!"

"It'll be a dead go!"

The fourth day, Pomp kept watch on deck nearly all the morning. The darky never once suspected the proximity of the two ruffians.

He supposed, as did all the others, that they were far on their way to the coast, and this was his grand and fatal mistake.

What Pomp was on the lookout for was the Ashantee warriors, but it was evident very clearly, that there were none of these in the vicinity.

So the darky felt quite safe.

Indeed, he was thrown somewhat off his guard. He was most anxious to do a special bit of cooking for the evening meal, and this bit of zeal cost him dear.

"I don' flink dar be enny trubble," he muttered. "I jes' gwine fo' to take de chaine anyway. So here goes!"

Down he went into the galley.

Fatal move!

He had hardly left the forward platform, when out of the shadows of the haunted valley crept two stealthy forms.

"I reckon ther coast is clear, Donny!"

"All clear!"

"Slide ahead!"

Like shadows they flitted alongside the Phaeton; Pomp was inside busily at work.

Silently the two invaders crept over the rail. The steel curtains were closed on that side of the vehicle.

They flitted to the rear end along the side platform. In the rear compartment was kept the prisoner, Biglin.

He was bound in such a manner, that while his arms and legs were not cramped, he could not nevertheless get away or free himself.

Donovan looked in through a window and saw him.

"Whist!" he exclaimed, in sibilant tones. "Are ye there, Tony?"

"Great Scott!" gasped Biglin. "Is it you, Clark? And Sam, too! Did you walk all the way back for this?"

"We did, an' it looks a heap as if we had the nippers on this nigger."

"Go slow! he is dead game and will fight."

"Oh, we ain't goin' to take any chances on him. But jes' keep yer grit up, pard, an' we'll help ye out of thar pooty quick."

"Good for you, boys," chuckled Biglin; "luck is with us!"

With this the two rascals left the window and crept around to that side of the wagon which had the sliding curtains open.

Here they saw Pomp.

But the darky's back was turned to them. The two villains had been given pistols by Frank when he liberated them.

Donovan drew his and covered the darky. Then he said in stern tones:

"Hands up! I've got the drop on yer!"

A bursting bomb right under him could not have given Pomp a greater shock.

He gave a convulsive leap, turned, and faced his captors with a gasp.

"Fo' de Lor's sakes! de debbil hab done dis! Now I hab jes' gone an' done it. Massy sakes, massy sakes!"

"Hands up!" roared Donovan, "an' quit yer howlin' or I'll make a first class sieve of yer."

There was nothing for Pomp but to surrender. Basset twisted his hands behind him and fastened them.

In that moment his life hung in the balance.

Basset drew a murderous knife and said:

"Shall I slit his windpipe, pard? Dead men—you know!"

Donovan hesitated.

"Hold on!" he cried. "We don't know how to run the machinery of this ere thing!"

"You're right!"

"We'll make ther nigger do it until we learn how."

"It's agreed."

So Pomp was taken into the pilot house and bound tightly to the keyboard.

Then the villains released Biglin.

The three held a jollification in the main section of the Phaeton. They broke open a choice case of wine, and imbibed freely.

But it suddenly occurred to Biglin that they were undergoing some risk in remaining where they were.

"The whole gang will be back soon," he declared. "They'll be too many for us. Suppose we take a run down to Accra and pick up more men. Then we can return, do up that gang, and open the big mine in style."

"Done!" cried the other villains.

They returned to the pilot house. It was lucky for them that they did, for Pomp had nearly freed himself.

They secured him with double strength, leaving his arms free, and Donovan held a pistol to his head.

"Start ther thing ahead," he said, gruffly. "Steer her out onto ther open plains."

Pomp's whole being rebelled. But he was shrewd enough to see that nothing was to be gained by refusal. He would watch and wait.

So he started the Phaeton ahead.

"Faster!" commanded his captor.

He was obliged to comply.

Out of the haunted valley rolled the vehicle. Out onto the plain, and then Donovan set the course.

All that afternoon Pomp was obliged to propel the wagon away from the Pyramid Hills. Soon they were out of sight altogether on the horizon.

The captors of the Phaeton were jubilant. They could not restrain their delight at their important acquisition.

"This is great!" cried Biglin. "I tell you, boys, we will travel all over Africa now!"

"You bet!"

"We needn't be afraid of an army."

"Hurrah!"

They made free with everything on board, to Pomp's agony.

"Oh, wha' will Marse Frank tink!" the faithful darky kept groaning to himself. "He nebber forgib dis chile in all his life!"

In vain the darky tried to think of some way to circumvent his foes. He tried every plan.

"If dey wud only jes' git out on dat for'ard platform all together, and put dere hands on dat rail, I'd hab 'em solid," he reflected, and he looked at the little connection of wires which would throw the current into the rail.

Once, two of them were at the rail, but Pomp dared not try the scheme.

He could easily have shocked those two into insensibility, but the third one could have blown his brains out for it.

"De time ain' come yet," muttered the darky. "Mebbe it will," and he kept watch.

It is often said "to those who wait all things come." There was a literal verification of this proverb in the present case.

A discussion of the electric gun led up to the consummation of Pomp's keen desire.

Biglin led the way out onto the front platform. He stooped down over the gun leaning on the rail as he did so.

Donovan was by his side and one hand was grasping the rail. At this moment Basset came along.

Pomp's heart fluttered.

Would his opportunity come? He reached up and connected the wires. His finger was on the button and he watched the villains like a cat.

Basset lounged nearer. He was smoking a pipe. Pomp drew a deep breath.

Nearer the villain drew to the rail. Then he leaned heavily against it.

Flash!

There was a vivid glare of light, the three villains experienced an astounding shock and lost their senses.

All three went over the rail to the prairie. They lay there as inanimate as logs.

Pomp let out a yell of exultation; around came the head of the Phaeton and away it boomed toward the Pyramid Hills like mad.

"Golly, I's done it, I's done it," cried the triumphant darky, "dey don' cotch dis chile now!"

Away went the Phaeton like mad. It was fast growing dark.

Pomp trusted to his eyesight as well as he could to locate the Pyramid Hills. But when darkness came he was puzzled.

He knew that he was fully seventy miles from them, and that in order to reach them by traveling in the darkness he should set a course by the compass.

But alas! he was tied in such a manner that he could not easily liberate himself. In this dilemma he decided that it was better to go slow until daylight.

He turned on the search-light and sent its glare out over the plains. As near as he could judge he kept a straight course.

It seemed an interminable period to Pomp before daylight came again. He did not close his eyes in sleep.

Fatigue was beginning to tell upon him, however. It seemed as if he must succumb ere long to the intense mental strain.

"Golly! mah head feel all full ob crinkles!" he muttered. "Kain't say I like de feelin' fo' a cent."

For all he knew he might have been wandering from his course all night. He worried about this.

But this proved to be not true. With the first break of day he experienced a thrill of delight.

For there directly in front of him were the summits of the Pyramid Hills. Pomp put on all power.

The Phaeton fairly flew.

A railroad train could hardly have gone faster. Fortunately the plain was as smooth as a floor.

Two hours passed.

The hills had risen up out of the plain and were now in bold relief. Pomp calculated that they were not twelve miles distant.

"I's gwine to git dar in half an hour," he muttered, "den I reckon dis chile hab to gib up."

Indeed exhaustion was fast getting the better of him. But on bowled the Phaeton at terrific rate. Pomp's calculation proved true.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A CONFESSION—THE END.

It took less than half an hour to reach the entrance to the haunted valley. Pomp steered the Phaeton into the coulee.

And as he shut off the current he heard a great shout.

Looking out of the pilot house window he saw Frank and Barney running toward the Phaeton.

Then he fell over the keyboard in a dead faint.

Nature had succumbed. Thus the four prospectors found him a few moments later.

They had passed an anxious night in camp and were just upon the point of leaving the Hills when the Phaeton hove into view.

Pomp was quickly resuscitated and then told his story.

He was the hero of the hour.

"By Jove!" cried Morden fairly embracing him. "You are the saving of us. You showed pluck!"

"That is true," cried Sharpe. "He is made of the right stuff."

"Begorra, naygur," said Barney with sincerity, "I'd as soon 'ave lost me own brother as yez, an' I had gin yez up fer dead."

"Golly! dem rascals wanted fo' to cut mah froat once," cried Pomp. "I'se a heap glad dey changed dere minds."

"So are all of us," cried Frank.

A quick consultation was now held as to what it was best to do. A quick decision was reached.

"We will go to the coast," declared Morden; "there I will buy a stamp mill and Mr. Sharpe and I will sign partnership papers. We will then make up a caravan and return, and—Mr. Reader!"

"Well?" said Frank.

"You will go home by the same steamer that brought you!"

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Then I will express my gratitude to you in the most unmeasured terms and beg you to take a message to my mother for me, and if I am not able to prove my innocence through Biglin, she shall come to me here."

"I will carry your message with the utmost pleasure," said Frank, "and I wish you the best of prosperity."

"Thank you."

With this understanding the Phaeton set out for the Gold Coast. Frank had no doubt but that he could make close connection with the captain of the Golden City at Cape Three Points.

There was not a little speculation as to the possible fate of the three villains who had been electrified by Pomp and left upon the plain senseless.

"I hab no idee dat any one ob dem was killed," declared the darky. "I reckon dey berry quick git up an' go about dere business."

"Perhaps we will run across them," said Morden.

For two days the Phaeton kept on in the stickiest kind of weather. There was alternate rain and blistering sunshine.

The climate of the Ashantee country was certainly something vile. At least they found it so.

On the morning of the third day the thrilling events which terminate our story occurred.

The Phaeton ran into a wild region, half jungle, half forest. The machine was threading its way around a hummock, when a distant, startling sound was heard.

It was the crack of a rifle.

Then followed the quivering echo provoking roar of a mad lion. In an instant everybody sprang up.

"A lion hunt!" cried Frank. "Let us take a look at it. Perhaps some one is in trouble."

The machine quickly ran around the hummock.

The voyagers came in sight of an open space in the verge of the jungle.

There a thrilling scene was being enacted.

Two men lay lifeless upon the dry grass. They were literally torn asunder.

Near them lay a dead lion.

The occupants of the Phaeton saw all this. But beyond this scene was another more thrilling.

There was another lion, and a man feebly battling with it. The lion was wounded, but yet was getting the best of the man, who was drenched in blood.

"Jericho!" gasped Sharpe, the detective, "that is a hard show for him."

"Who is he?" asked Morden, straining his gaze.

"It is Biglin!" cried Frank.

This was the truth. The lone fighter of the lion was no other than Tony Biglin.

The others were his two rascally comrades, Donovan and Basset. It was easy to see through all.

The three wretches, recovering from the electric shock given them by Pomp, had set out on foot for the coast.

They had accidentally run into the hunting range of a couple of lions who at once attacked them, for when the king of beasts is hungry, he will not hesitate even to attack human beings.

A battle most awful had followed. Of course there could be but one termination of such a conflict.

The bullets fired by the white men had subdued one of the lions, but his life had cost those of Basset and Donovan.

And Biglin was left to fight the other monster single-handed. It was an awful predicament.

That he would eventually have been overpowered there was no doubt. But the arrival of the Electric Phaeton put a new face on matters at once.

Frank ran the machine down to close range.

Then Barney and Pomp with their Winchesters opened fire on the lion. Three shots were sufficient to settle him.

Biglin lay weak and fainting upon the sward. But Morden and Sharpe had leaped down and rushed to his side.

Restoratives were applied, and he was taken aboard the machine.

Then an examination was made, and his wounds were found to be not necessarily fatal. All through this ordeal he preserved a sullen silence.

No questions were asked him, and no conversation made. But in the pilot-house a little later a consultation was held.

"What shall we do with him?" was the query.

"We cannot very well leave him here," said Frank, "he would die."

"Which would be a mercy to the world at large," said Sharpe.

"Undoubtedly, but it would not be humanity. I think we had better take him through to the coast."

"Perhaps he will relent on the way and make a confession," said Morden, hopefully.

"Perhaps he will."

So the matter was decided.

Decent burial was given the remains of Donovan and Basset. Their villainies were at an end.

Then the journey to the coast was continued.

Every day now they drew nearer to the coast. They even fancied that they could feel the salt air.

This would be a relief from the stifling heat and oppression of the interior. The climate was certainly very trying to all.

One day they topped a rise, and the great spread of the Atlantic lay before them. A great cry of joy went up.

The machine had soon reached the shore. There was Cape Three Points, but the Golden City was not there. But Frank said:

"It is not due until to-morrow, anyway. There is plenty of time yet."

At this juncture Barney came forward, and said:

"Misther Frank, the sick man wants to see yez."

Frank went aft to the little compartment where Biglin lay in a bunk. The villain's face was strangely changed as Frank entered, and there was a new light in his eyes.

"Mr. Reade," he said, "I've made up my mind."

"What?" said Frank.

"I am going to confess. I know that I have done wrong; I am the man who ought to serve that sentence for bank robbery and I am going to do it. My life is broken now anyway, and I feel sorry for Alfred. I am going to set him right."

"I am glad to hear you say that," said Frank. "I shall have more respect for you hereafter. Shall I call in the others?"

"If you please."

In response to this request the rest of the party came in. Biglin then told his story.

It completely cleared Morden in every particular. A great load seemed lifted from Biglin's mind when he had finished.

"At any rate," he said, "I feel better. I was not myself all the while I knew that Alfred was behind bars. I am willing to go to prison."

Alfred Morden arose and said:

"Tony, you did me a great wrong. You broke our friendship and cost me a heap of suffering. But I want to say this to you, that I have no hard feelings against you."

"I am glad of that," said Biglin, gratefully.

"I will do all I can to mitigate your sentence. At least I will not appear against you in any trial."

The wretch was quite overcome, and wept profusely.

"I don't think I shall live to reach America," he said. "That lion's tooth went pretty deep into my shoulder. But in any event I feel better."

The confession of Biglin quite changed all plans.

Sharpe, the detective, took him formally into custody, serving the papers of arrest upon him. Then Morden said to Frank:

"When you get back to New York tell my mother all, and that I shall come back to her safe and well, and with a fortune."

"I will do so," agreed Frank.

To Sharpe Morden said:

"I am sorry that you have got to return to New York with the prisoner, but I will say this: You shall return by the next steamer and share with me the proceeds of the mine."

"That is very generous," replied Sharpe, "and I accept."

Thus all the plans were made.

Barney and Pomp had already begun to take the Phaeton apart, so that it could be packed in sections aboard the steamer.

Alfred Morden took leave of the party, making his way to a small settlement a few miles down the coast.

Thence he proceeded at once to Accra to procure material and organize a party of miners.

Promptly the Golden City appeared in the little bay of Cape Three Points. Then the machine was taken aboard in sections.

A couple of days were spent in this manner. But finally the Golden City turned her prow westward.

The journey home was propitious and without special incident. The Golden City arrived safely in New York.

The Phaeton was packed aboard a train and sent on to Readestown. Barney and Pomp went thither with it.

Tony Biglin was taken to the Tombs by Detective Sharpe. There he was committed for trial.

And so ended the great trip beyond the Gold Coast.

But the most gratifying reward Frank Reade, Jr., received was the intense joy and gratitude of Mrs. Morden. She was utterly unable to express herself in words.

"God will forever bless you," she said; "I can say no more."

But this satisfied the philanthropic young inventor. He was well satisfied.

He returned to Readestown and resumed work upon a new invention. But letters came to him regularly from the Gold Coast.

They told of the success of Morden and Sharpe, and how they had made a vast sum out of the Pyramid Hills mines. Some day they intended to return to America.

Tony Biglin went to prison, but it was said that he was happier there for the knowledge that he had done the right thing.

Barney and Pomp are still in Readestown as lively as two crickets, and only waiting for Frank Reade, Jr., to take a new start for some other exciting field of adventure.

Until such time let us take a short leave of them and write

[THE END.]

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